

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, November 30, 1900

Washington, D.C., Volta Bureau, November 30, 1900. Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell, 6 Rue Longchamp, Paris, France.

I have just finished a scientific letter to Daisy, and wonder what she will say or do, and now I have just received your note of November 17, the second note I have received since leaving London. Glad to hear of your visit to Reims, and the champagne cellars. "Seven miles of tunnels of the average height of fourteen feet by twelve wide cut through solid walls of hard chalk and all these tunnels lined with stands of full champagne bottles"! That seems to be a pretty big champagne cellar, but knowing that travelers tell strange tales, and that you are not to be called strictly to scientific account for in your figures — I make due allowances in my mind. Still, with all allowances, the large chambers with radiating tunnels, filled with champagne bottles, must have been a sight indeed.

You don't say a word about your mother. I have been fearful that she might have had some return of the fever she had in London when I was there. Your long ?? silence has alarmed me, although I have said nothing to Charlie or Grace about it. I wish she knew how much I love her. Now that I have recovered my right hand in Bessie Safford, perhaps I may be able to write to her myself. Only I know that she — like yourself — cares little for a typewritten letter — and that of course means — silence SILENCE where I am concerned.

Uncle David has been quite ill, and is now in bed with a trained nurse in attendance. He has been much depressed on account of the poorness of his sight, feeling himself almost entirely blind. He is suffering from diabetes, but seems now to be improving. He was quite bright yesterday, sitting up in bed, and laughing and talking freely. I have not heard how he is this morning. Of course any illness is a serious matter with one of his great age. I am glad to know from your letter that Aileen intends to sail tomorrow. If I cannot had not heard

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this I had thought of cabling to you suggesting her early return, for I can see that Charlie and all the family are troubled at Uncle David's condition. Aunt Ellen is quite well, and has now recovered from her rheumatic attack. Robbie Ker is staying with them. What a fine girl she has turned out to be. She seems to be quite pleased that I am one of her admirers. There is another "Alec" here — not quite so old as I am — who seems to admire her too, Alexander Ballachy, Carrie's youngest son, a fine 3 bright fellow. Carrie and her son are staying at my father's Both seem well.

My father is in fine condition, stepping out briskly like a young man. He has twice, if not thrice, written his "last address" and now he is at work upon a lecture to be delivered in New York at Columbia University on December 17; a lecture on Visible Speech. He has just read it to me and it is one of the finest things he has ever written. I shall run on to New York with him to see him through.

Mrs. Bell seems to take good care of him, and to inspire him with ambition to do more work. She is just as sweet and good as she can be, and I am perfectly satisfied that he should have married in his old age.

Charlie and Grace are both well, but I have not seen the children yet. Grace and Miss Safford seem to have been quite troubled about my comfort, and everything seems very nice at the Bureau. At first the upstairs room was converted into a bed room, and the downstairs room into an office for me, and now Miss Safford has made me try the experiment of using the downstairs room as a bed room, and the upstairs room as an office. The upper room is admirably adapted as an office, but the downstairs room is not adapted for a bed room. Still I tried the experiment one night, and have come to the conclusion that the arrangement is an improvement, so I propose to retain the lower room as 4 bed room and get rid of the inconveniences one by one.

The door leading into the reading room has been locked, and the key hidden, so that the room cannot any more be used as a thoroughfare; and the telephone is to be removed into

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the larger room. The door leading into the open air is to be provided with a bolt, so that no exploring burglar may walk in upon me unawares in the middle of the night. The window is to be arranged so that I can open the top for a foot or two and leave it so permanently at night, without the possibility of the window being raised from the outside. The place where the door is, leading into the larger room, is to be converted into a coat closet. It is very convenient having the wash stand just outside the door, and altogether I think I will be very comfortable here.

I had thought of taking a room somewhere near the Census Office, but I think it would be better for me to stay here in the Bureau, and be near my grandfather. I may never again have the opportunity I have now of seeing him every day. He enjoys my presence and I love to pop over and see him.

He paid me a visit the day before yesterday, and seemed to enjoy lying on the sofa with a cigar in his mouth listening to me as I dictated a letter.

Our bank account is overdrawn by more than one thousand dollars, so I presume you have all the money you want, but I have to provide something for myself, so I have borrowed two thousand dollars until the 15th of January; but this will not be enough, as Mr. McInnis requires money, and I will have to send several hundred dollars to Baddeck. There are quite a number of repairs we shall have to make too. The rustic work at the Lodge, is in such a condition that it must be removed or replaced. The wharf at the warehouse needs replacing, and I have asked Mr. McInnis to obtain estimates of the cost of a stone pier (permanent). I have quite a list of things that Mr. McInnis wanted to have done, but I cannot take them up just now.

John McDermid wishes to give up gardening, and go to Sydney. He wants some employment that does not involve stooping. He has been looking after the horses, &c., I believe recently, and is much improved in health. His father and mother are not able to do much work now about the farm, and John McDermid wants to sell the place and invest the

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money in a business in Sydney. He has about one hundred and fifty acres, I think, and the price he has in mind is \$1,500.

I attended a meeting of the Library Trustees in Baddeck, and Mr. Kennan insisted upon his resignation as President. We appointed Arthur W. McCurdy as President, in his place.

Maria is still unmarried. It seems she has more than one admirer, and the young man to whom she was engaged objected to her going for a drive and attending a concert, or theater, (or theatrical performance in Baddeck), with her other admirer — a much older man — old enough, I understand to be her father — and a Roman Catholic to boot. The young man was at her house when the older man came to take her out for a drive. He said nothing, but NEVER CAME BACK. Rumor says that she is now going to be revenged by marrying the older man, and all her friends are down on her for taking up with a Roman Catholic.

Elsie and Bert are now upon the Atlantic, and the vessel is due here about the fifth of December. Grace has secured rooms in the Leveret on H Street. I am glad Bert will be here so soon for I am troubled about Geographic matters.

McGee and all the members of the lecture committee are away, and the lecture course is in a poor condition. No one can do the work that Mr. Hubbard did in this matter. He devoted himself to the lecture courses and made them a success, arranging each lecture a long time in advance, so that the lecturers were duly prepared. I am much dissatisfied with the condition of affairs, and have called a Board meeting for this afternoon. I shall have to take the matter up myself and work hard, although I do not feel competent — myself — to arrange for the lectures. However Bert will soon be here, and he will be of great assistance.

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Very shortly after I left here the Board had another meeting and reversed their action on certain points. The lecture tickets admit two persons as of old. However, perhaps it is just 7 as well.

Charlie says that plans have been received from five architects, concerning a Hubbard Memorial building. There will be a meeting very soon to consider the details.

A few jokes in conclusion: —

A Lord Bishop of something or other, was dining with Willie Ker, out in the west, and the children were duly impressed by Willie's attempts to do him honor. It was "My Lord" this, and "My Lord" that, and Robbie reports that one of the children, duly impressed with the dignity and importance of the great man, turned to his father and said "Papa, does Jesus Christ want the butter?"

By the by, Robbie Ker seems to be quite a McCurdy in the way she remembers stories. She got off quite a number of good things to me the other day.

What is better than an idea? — You dear.

Why is a kiss like creation? — Because it is made of nothing, and God knows it is good.

Why is a fellow kissing his girl, like eating soup with a knitting needle? It takes a long time to get enough.

Why is a hinge like you? — Something to adore.

A little fellow referring to a derm e a tologist, converted him into a " dirty mologist; " and when he witnessed the inaugural parade pointed to McKinley's carriage, and exclaimed "Why, there's the President of the United Mistakes. "

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Let me add a few others on my own account.

A school boy composition, described a rabbit as “ an animal with long ears at one end, and an anecdote at the other. ” And when he was asked what he meant by an anecdote he said he had been told that an anecdote meant “a short tail”.

Another school boy composition described the lungs — very properly — as “organs of execration”.

An Irish chaplain in the Transvaal concluded his sermon to the men with the following words “If you have one spark of heavenly grace — water it — water it — water it continually”.

Talking of the Transvaal reminds me that Mr. Atwater has returned from the Transvaal without a scratch after having been in no less than thirty-eight engagements. He seems to have been right in the front of everything, and is very happy now “in fighting his battles over again”. He spent two days with me at Beinn Bhreagh, and I enjoyed his reminiscences very much— excepting in one particular. He told me that at the battle of Sand River a Boer gun annoyed them so much that they concentrated fire upon it and killed the officer and men in charge, subsequently capturing the gun. On examining the bodies, lying around the gun it was found that the officer in charge was a German. Papers in his pockets revealed the fact that his name was “Von Sonnenburg” and he had a passport signed by the Emperor, stating that he was a German military expert, and had permission to travel in the Transvaal and Orange Free State to observe the war on behalf of the German government — but not to take part in it. It seems that the gun had been silenced twice before he took hold. Two sets of men had been killed, and the third time there was no one to take charge, excepting the German officer who was supposed to be a non-combatant.

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Mt. A e t water seemed to be much troubled when he found that I was specially interested in this matter, and said that under the circumstances he would not like to swear to the name being Von Sonnenburg, although that was his impression.

His description of the man tallied exactly, but then he said, all g G erman officers copied the Emperor in their personal appearance, and turned up their moustaches in the same ridiculous way. He says that if weffelt a special interest in the matter he could write to the War Department, or to some person in authority, who could supply the exact name of the German officer killed upon the occasion.

I am afraid I cannot have my Wednesday evening meetings here at the Volta Bureau; but I don't feel like opening the house. I wonder whether I could not receive my gentlemen friends in Elsie's rooms at the Leveret.